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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 CARACAS 000766

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DEPARTMENT PASS TO AID/OTI (RPORTER)

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [VE](#)
SUBJECT: CHAVEZ PRESSES RADICAL AGENDA DURING FIFTH
ANNIVERSARY OF APRIL INTERREGNUM

REF: CARACAS 000725

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Classified By: POLITICAL COUNSELOR ROBERT DOWNES
REASON 1.4 (D)

¶1. (C) Summary. President Chavez exploited the April 11-13 commemorations of the fifth anniversary of the short-lived April 2002 coup to convey some of his most extreme political positions to date, and to buttress "Bolivarian" myths. Specifically, the Venezuelan president ruled out any meaningful agreement with the United States ("empire") or consensus with the democratic opposition ("rotten political class"). He urged all members of the military to wholeheartedly embrace socialism or quit. Chavez also utilized the anniversary to further demonize RCTV, the independent broadcaster he intends to shut down by May 29. It remains to be seen whether Chavez' unrestrained triumphalism can build "revolutionary" fervor or, more likely, if his uncompromising radicalism helps to erode his popular support. End Summary.

Bolivarian Myth-Making

¶2. (SBU) President Chavez personally led much of the BRV's April 11 to 13 commemorations of the fifth anniversary of what the government calls "national resistance" to the "oligarchic, imperialist, media-inspired coup." Chavez delivered a series of speeches, presided at a housing credit give-away event at the Fort Tiuna military base in Caracas, and led a mass rally in front of the presidential palace. The BRV mandated that all radio and television networks broadcast most of his addresses on all three days. The BRV also launched civil-military parades in the states of Aragua, Merida, and Tachira. In addition, the BRV rolled out a ubiquitous new slogan for the commemorations -- "Every 11th has its 13th" -- to assert that "external and internal enemies" are plotting against the Chavez government, but also could never overcome popular support for Chavez.

¶3. (C) Chavez and other BRV senior officials devoted considerable air time to weave an "official" history of the confusing April 11-13 interregnum. Key elements of the revisionist BRV history of the short-lived coup include unsubstantiated, and in some cases demonstrably false, repeated assertions that:
-- the USG orchestrated Chavez' brief ouster with local "oligarchs";

-- anti-Chavez protesters had been duped by a private media campaign;
-- only a few military "traitors" were complicit (the rest "misinformed");
-- Chavez never resigned from office;
-- Chavez prevented considerable bloodshed by "agreeing" to be detained;
-- the opposition's plan was to kill Chavez; and,
-- Carmona intended to impose a "fascist" dictatorship.
Chavez also declared that the 19 persons killed in clashes between pro-Chavez and anti-Chavez groups are "martyrs." Government media outlets compared Chavez' return to power on April 13, 2002 as a "resurrection." At his April 13 mass rally, Chavez called the April 11-13 events Venezuela's "Bay of Pigs."

No Dialogue With The United States

¶4. (SBU) During his April 11-13 speeches, President Chavez repeatedly took aim at the United States ("empire") and discounted any possibility of cooperation with the USG. During a televised April 10 medical student graduation attended by Cuban Vice-President Carlos Lage, Chavez accused the United States of deploying a submarine and an aircraft carrier, as well as landing helicopters at Caracas' international airport, to support Chavez' short-lived ouster April 11-13, 2002. During his April 13 mass rally, the Venezuelan president said "There is a real dictatorship in the United States that seeks to impose its dictatorship on the world." He attributed the U.S.-led intervention in Iraq and U.S. "support" for his ouster in April 2002 to a U.S. plan to gain control of world oil reserves.

¶5. (SBU) Chavez bluntly stated in a press conference immediately before the rally that "there is no possibility of

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an understanding between our revolution and the United States government, or American imperialism." "One cannot be on good terms with God and the devil," Chavez continued, "either you are with God, or you are with the devil." (On the margins of an April 13 human rights conference at Central University of Caracas, the Ambassador, speaking to the media, refuted BRV accusations that the USG is plotting against the BRV as well as the BRV's many other accusations against the USG. He reiterated that the United States seeks the best possible relations with all governments.)

Forget About The Opposition

¶6. (SBU) President Chavez also ruled out any possibility of dialogue with the opposition. During his April 12 televised broadcast, the Venezuelan president noted that "the local aristocracy also offered paths to understanding, but there are none; they will never accept us." In a message to his administration's moderates, Chavez warned, "if any of us continue making this error, stop making that mistake." He insisted that the opposition, with U.S. support, "will always forge maneuvers to try to get us out." Warming to his topic, Chavez asked all Venezuelans to "radicalize our revolution" and to stop trying to "find consensus where none is possible" or advocating a "light" variation of Chavismo. During the April 13 mass rally, Chavez asked sarcastically if attendees really believed that there can be any agreement with "the unpatriotic Venezuelan oligarchy, this old, rotten political class that governed here for half a century or more?"

¶7. (SBU) Chavez also exploited commemoration events to promote the formation of a single pro-government political party, the United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV). At the April 13 mass rally, he gave special recognition to former Education and Sports Minister Aristobulo Isturiz and

leaders of the pro-Chavez Patra Para Todos (PPT) for leaving the PPT in the wake of the party's April 10 decision not to dissolve. He once again urged PPT and the Communist Party (and the Podemos Party indirectly) to dissolve and to join the PSUV, noting that the moment has come to create "a new instrument for the new era that has begun."

Military Must Be "Red"

¶8. (SBU) During the April 12 event at Fort Tiuna in Caracas, Chavez delivered pointed remarks to the military, consistent with his injunction during last year's presidential campaign that the military should be "red, very red." Specifically, Chavez told members of the armed forces that at every level they are "obligated to respect to the bottom of their soul and raise the flag with the slogan 'My country, socialism, or death' without any ambiguities or complexes." He warned that if anyone is uncomfortable with this direction, they should step down. Chavez called the institutional independence of the Armed Forces a "masquerade to avoid committing to the revolution." At the April 13 mass rally, uniformed rows of Reservists were visible in the crowd, including all of the first twenty or so rows in front of the stage from which Chavez spoke. Interestingly, in a TV interview with former Vice-President Jose Vicente Rangel that aired on a government station April 15, Defense Minister Raul Isias Baduel framed the military's loyalties in a more nuanced way. Baduel said the professional armed forces protect the "supreme interests of the nation" and denied they exhibit "political partiality" (Septel).

RCTV: Principal Conspirator

¶9. (SBU) The BRV also utilized the fifth anniversary events to further vilify RCTV, the private, independent broadcast network that President Chavez intends to close by May 29. Chavez repeatedly referred to the "media-induced" crisis of April 2002 and blamed the private media for "poisoning" and "misleading" anti-Chavez protesters. A specially-prepared pro-government TV documentary and government print ads also highlighted RCTV's "censorship" of demonstrations calling for Chavez' return to power. These slick media products focus on RCTV's decision to air cartoons at the time that Carmona's short-lived government was crumbling. On the afternoon of April 14, about 50 pro-Chavez Tupamaro demonstrators

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vandalized RCTV with graffiti calling for the station's closure.

¶10. (C) RCTV lawyer Osvaldo Quintana, addressing the Central University's Human Rights conference on April 13, once again insisted the broadcaster has a license to operate until 2022 and argued that the BRV is singling out the station for political reasons, not to gain communications capabilities (the BRV already controls six television stations and over 100 radio stations). Andres Canizales of the NGO Reporters Without Borders expressed concern over the lack of plurality in Venezuela's media outlets and questioned the BRV's decision to use regulatory authorities to close RCTV rather than seek legal action in the courts.

Residual Legal Actions

¶11. (SBU) In addition to the highly-politicized commemorations, the BRV continues to pursue various legal cases related to the April 2002 interregnum. A criminal appeals court voted 3-0 (with one abstention and once absence) to request the extradition of Pedro Carmona, the transitional president during the April 11-12 military

rebellion, from Colombia. The BRV accuses Carmona, the then-head of Venezuela's Confederation of Commerce Chambers (FEDECAMERAS), of being the intellectual author of a failed assassination attempt on President Chavez. Prosecutors started seeking judicial approval for Carmona's extradition in April 2006. The court is now responsible for forwarding the extradition request to the Ministry of Popular Power for Foreign Affairs to convey the formal extradition request to the Colombian government within 60 days. Carmona escaped from prison and fled to Colombia in May 2002.

¶12. (U) The BRV continues to press charges against three Caracas former police officials, Ivan Simonovis, Lazaro Forero, and Henry Vivas, as well as eight police officers, as accomplices to murder related to the events of April 2002. The USG considers them political prisoners, per the 2006 Department Human Rights Report. Simonovis, Forero, and Vivas have been detained for over two years, and according to Venezuelan law, should have been released in November 2006 for the remainder of their trial. The other eight have been held even longer. The ex-commissioners launched a hunger strike April 10 to protest their transfer to a Police Intelligence (DISIP) installation closer to the court house in Maracay where they are being tried (Reftel). An NGO representing victims of the April 2002 violence (VIVE) is publicly complaining that, so far, the BRV is only investigating violence against pro-government demonstrators.

¶13. (SBU) In addition, the BRV is appealing a lower court's December 15, 2006, acquittal of opposition Baruta Mayor Enrique Capriles Radonski on charges that he was an accomplice to an April 12, 2002, attack on the Cuban Embassy. The first hearing of the appeal was held April 16 and the three appellate judges will reconvene the trial within ten working days. Moreover, a separate judge recently extended a travel ban on some 21 of the more than 400 observers of the Carmona inauguration. Maria Corina Machado of Sumate is among the persons proscribed from traveling outside Venezuela without prior government permission.

Comment

¶14. (C) President Chavez is investing considerable effort and sparing no expense to promote his own version of contemporary Venezuelan history. The BRV's April 11-13 commemoration events come on the heels of showy, Chavez-led efforts to memorialize Chavez' failed February 4, 1992 military coup as well as the February 27, 1989 "Caracazo" rioting that helped discredit Venezuela's traditional political parties. Poloffs watched several hundred red-shirted Chavistas assemble at one of 11 Caracas gathering points for the April 13 mass rally, and the Chavez political machine was in full gear. Most attendees wore specially-produced red t-shirts and caps with the slogan "Every 11th has its 13th." Groups were bused in from several other states (including on state oil company buses), and the Metro was made free to facilitate attendance. A Finance Ministry employee confirmed for Poloff that government workers were required to attend the rally (many attendees wore shirts bearing their agencies' logos in lieu

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of t-shirts).

¶15. (C) Zulia governor and former opposition presidential candidate Manuel Rosales criticized the BRV's commemoration events, noting that the April 2002 confrontation is not something to "celebrate." Rosales' rebuke and the Catholic clergy's calls for reconciliation, however, were largely drowned out by Chavez and other senior BRV officials, who dominated the air waves with their "socialist" interpretation of recent history. Nevertheless, as Chavez radicalizes his message, it remains to be seen whether he can really inspire genuine "revolutionary" fervor, or even sustain his current level of popular support. Poloffs observed scant genuine

enthusiasm at the Plaza Venezuela rallying point among a largely desultory crowd. A number of bused-in attendees eluded or ignored their demonstration "captains" and sought shade on the sidewalks rather than march downtown on schedule.

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